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ENGLISH IN PART-TIME CLASSES

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Successful teaching depends in large measure upon a clear appreciation of intent. Teaching presupposes purpose, and it is the aim of the writer to set forth the functions of part-time schooling in general and of the English instruction in particular. Subject-interest should prompt readers of the *Journal* to acquaint themselves with the difficult situations presented in this new field and with the varied methods employed. Trial and error have predominated in the determination of usable content and organization. Certain tendencies are manifest and there comes now to English teachers the responsibility to further some movements and to place themselves in constructive opposition to others. *Let it be understood at the outset that the discussion here made does not concern the work of trade schools and other such full-time vocational institutions.* Our whole attention centers upon class work for employed youths who give an hour or less each week to the subject.

THE AIMS OF THE NEW CLASSES

Part-time classes presume to upgrade young people who for one reason or another have left the full-time institutions and are variously employed and variously suited to advancement in the lines of work chosen. We now know that everyone needs help regardless of age or interest, and federal funds are available for the support of continued general and specific education during a few hours of each week. The elementary schools give no specific vocational training. They cannot and they should not. They serve ever more clearly defined purposes, but not all of our young people complete them. Our secondary schools and our colleges are the best that the world has shown, but few even enter them. More than 60 per cent of our boys and girls do not complete the sixth grade. Of the million and more who leave school each year

only about one-tenth ever avail themselves of the various schools for special training. They hurry hopefully from us into a set of circumstances calculated to thwart ambition and to stifle progress. Their ages often do not permit of their entering the kinds of work which they want to do and which they leave school expecting to do. Shortsighted parents will not forsake the ready dollar for the deferred advantages of learn-and-earn employment. Places of business are usually not equipped physically or mentally to give logical training, for most kinds of employment are now specialized and employers dote on production. The chances of natural development and of wise selection of a life-work have been materially lessened. Some workers will rise by dint of unshaken purpose. Some will luckily drift into open thoroughfares. Some will be befriended. But these must not satisfy us. We must salvage a vast majority, and happily what is good for individuals is good for the nation as well. The need for general uplift and civic betterment is unquestioned. The most important social and economic step of a century is the attempt of states, with federal encouragement, to stem the waste of youthful human resources.

The specific fields subsidized by the grant begun in 1917 (Smith-Hughes Law) are agriculture, trades and industries, and home-making. Four or eight hours of each working week are commonly spent in part-time schools, and the subjects offered permit of a twofold division—shop courses, which provide skills, and academic courses, which convey related facts and insure general educational advancement. *English is universally given a place in the program* and contributes considerably to the realization of the law's purposes. What other subject *could* lead in insuring more intelligent and happier employment, stimulating ambition, and offering guidance? Through what other medium *could* so much be accomplished in providing a healthier, a more generally useful, and a more responsible type of young people? What other special teachers are as well prepared to discover latent abilities and to provoke alertness to personal and public welfare? The specific aim of each teacher employed to deal with these young workers should be to enhance their usefulness to homes and communities, to employers and themselves. They may get desirable viewpoints

almost nowhere else throughout the busy week. While in earlier years they met various inspiring personalities who gave daily encouragement and check, there may now be operating, during the major part of the routine life, directly opposing influences. At best, a passive rather than an enthusiastic appreciation of their good conduct and their efforts is experienced. The worth of this continued schooling must not be measured by the product of its shops but by changed attitudes within pupils and by the number encouraged to return to full-time training in fields once thought to be closed to them. The classes are successful and warrant their cost if the majority of students are taken to higher ground sufficiently often that they set for themselves ideals in work and in living and come to feel that the state offers means to their own best ends. These are fundamental things and the students served by the use of public money one day or one-half a day of every week deserve consideration equal to what we should have accorded them had they remained longer with us. They are simply coming back part time, some willingly and some by compulsion, for continued help, and they are making the definite demands that their experiences dictate. They come expecting practical shop helps and are content with nothing in academic fields that is not immediately and unquestionably useful.

STUDENTS, GROUPS, AND COURSES

The recognized divisions of part-time learners are general continuation students, trade-preparatory students, and trade-extension students. These we need not consider closely in discussion of academic work, though for vocational advancement the grouping is well advised. Suffice it for us to recognize wide ranges of age and size, of previous school attainment, of home surroundings and employment, of subject-mastery and interest. In some states, those fourteen to sixteen are enrolled; in others, fourteen to seventeen or eighteen; in some, none below sixteen. The grades completed range from the third year of the elementary school to the third year of the high school. Some come over directly from continuous schooling upon beginning employment; others have worked a year or two without any school connection. Many have

chosen the types of work in which they seek advancement and some are apprenticed in various trades, but the greatest number are variously employed and shift constantly from employer to employer or from one type of work to another. All are more interested in their several occupations than in what the school may be able to do for them. There are the physical and mental changes of the period in exaggerated form. Some boys and girls are exceptionally alert and others almost incapable of learning. Some have lived next to vicious lives and are wholly out of touch with influences to which our average students respond naturally. Nearly all have definite notions about the usefulness of what is offered and tend to reject what does not seem to fit closely and quickly into their varied plans and hopes for success.

Such conditions force a study of groups and the preparation of outlines varying as the groups. Boys and girls are taught separately. In small cities, grouping is by attainment or for the convenience of employers. In large systems, those pursuing machine work or plumbing, millinery or dressmaking, clerking or bookkeeping, automobile work, or carpentry are kept with their fellows in each class of the week. Schoolrooms, churches, community houses, and other convenient meeting places are most commonly used. The separate vocational building and the factory or store classroom are gaining in favor. There has been difference of opinion about the places of meeting, but, regarding distribution in a city, it makes little difference where they meet if distances can be equalized. The room for meeting is of more consequence than the building. I feel that academic teaching must be done in clean, quiet rooms apart from shops. There is such a thing as "shop atmosphere" and just as surely we can build a subject-feeling through the accommodations made. There should be good light and comfortable seats. There must be provision for written work and a maximum of board space. Books, pictures, charts, and all possible objective material must be in evidence. As a class files into a room so ordered, the noise and hurry of the shop will be quickly erased and minds turned to calm consideration of things entirely different.

Each teacher, after meeting and studying a group, should prepare an outline or chart of what may be attempted with that

group in the available time. Sections of work may well be *motivation, spelling, penmanship, sentence errors, paragraphs, letters, and appreciation of literature*. We must no longer make the mistake of using the English hour primarily to give knowledge of trade processes and interesting facts about raw materials and manufacturing or sales methods. English is English. Principles must be learned and habits formed. Applications can be made to check with interests, but only by the use of a subject-outline can there be any real subject-progress. In some localities teachers are urged to select essentials and to present them with all possible regard for general and specific experiences; in other places they are required to forsake logical presentation and to spend the periods promiscuously guiding oral and written discussion upon such topics as steel, cotton, milling, or any other center of the week's activity. *I believe there must be an outline which need not be exhibited, which must contain essential phases only, which must be continually modified as more and more is learned of group conditions.* Plans made for regular grade and high-school classes cannot be used. After groups have been organized a special unit must be arranged for each.

There should be specifically tabulated what it is thought best to present to twenty bargain-counter girls in eighteen one-hour meetings or to fifteen sheet-metal apprentices, seventeen years old, in thirty-six thirty-minute sessions. With such a guide, there will be improvement and the time spent by students using trade knowledge in illustrative drills will be fruitful. An important part of the work of my course for prospective teachers of English in vocational schools is the preparation of just such outlines and the charting, under subject-heads, of material which compels correlation with other school subjects and with the work of students outside of school. A teacher and a class having met, the first duty is thorough acquaintance. The things to be determined are: the aim of the school, the aim of the course, the age, grade, and knowledge ranges, the material equipment available, the number and length of meetings, and the results expected. Next comes a general basic review, and then the untiring adherence to a course made to meet just the set of conditions found. Teachers in part-time schools must work from specifications.

TEACHERS AND METHODS

The conditions that make group study necessary also require that the methods used be of the most forceful type. Our best teachers find it difficult to lead these people because of the individual and group differences. Student interests are best served in such trying situations by teachers thoroughly versed and possessed of subject-enthusiasm. Trained teachers would seem to be preferred to others who may have had greater opportunity to know the specific calls of a given industry or of vocations generally. The function of these classes is not that boys and girls shall be hurried into machine-like ability to meet trade demands. If this were the aim, engineers or practical craftsmen were best prepared. On the other hand, we need people ready to face perplexing class situations with skill. For trained English teachers the matter of trade application is not so hopeless as many have feared. We need subject-mastery, good judgment of values in materials, strength in methods, and some appreciation of the demands of industry. There must be a willingness and the initiative to meet special conditions with courage and openness. Adaptability is the chief credential, if any can be placed above good character and personal attractiveness. The duty is to measure abilities and aptitudes of individuals not always well grouped. No man or woman is entirely prepared for such a duty, nor will he ever pass the need for improvement. Nothing must be passed lightly by which would extend his appreciation of the conditions of labor and his knowledge of the materials and the processes which claim the attention of students outside the classroom. Such knowledge will prove a valuable asset, but must not be held requisite when teachers are selected. In this particular we face disappointing conditions.

Experiment is under way in some schools under the name of the one-man plan (or one-woman plan), students spending the entire four hours or eight hours of the school week under the supervision and instruction of one person, the trade instructor. A skilled mechanic, say an electrician, is assigned the duty of improving an entire group or several groups each week in trade skill, related knowledge, civics, English, hygiene, geography, art, and all other branches thought desirable. The result should be foreseen. He may neglect what he does not enjoy presenting or what does not

seem to appeal. Being more conscientious, he will attempt what he is very probably not prepared to do, and will make a bad matter worse. He will be without self-assurance, and he may be excelled by some of the class in the knowledge of the material itself. Let us keep every man to his last, and once the departmental plan is well under way, we may look for unity among those who deal with a given subject. We are coming to special teachers and special supervisors. The advisory committee, useful in establishing school policy and fostering understanding and co-operation, cannot be of help in course-building and cannot help on methods. We need subject-committees—part-time English committees composed of people not all of whom are doing part-time work.

From whatever sources we shall recruit our teachers, it will be best to have a general standard only and to assign teachers by consideration of individual fitness. This general standard might include physical and mental vigor, English-methods training, and a willingness to cull material and to develop skill to meet the conditions of a class and a system. Of course, all should become acquainted as rapidly as possible with the history and the literature of the vocational-education movement. They should enrol for study of the most recent and important attempts in guidance, program-building, and methods of teaching and testing. They should seek membership in promotive organizations and read vocational and teaching journals. Evening courses provided by the extension departments of universities and the regular and summer sessions of teacher-training institutions are the formal types of preparation. Conferences in which teachers of a city or a district exchange ideas have always been beneficial. Reading assignments and correspondence courses are interesting and good. Visiting days offer chances for comparison. It is a new work we are in and one which demands slightly different qualifications. These cannot be clearly named and we hope will not be soon standardized. The writer feels, however, that subject-training must remain a prime requirement.

Some hold that teaching must be largely individual and are doing no group work. We must insist on regular presentation and the individual work which naturally follows will be reduced in amount and will be more definite. To get along without class

teaching and discussion is to make one's self a mechanical repeater of principles, facts, corrections, and suggestions to one pupil after another. If there is not material enough within the range of the class to justify some instructive and inspirational classwork each period, the grouping is bad and should be changed. This failing, there is recourse to a division within the class so that small groups may be instructed and drilled as though members of separate classes. Individual lesson sheets, prepared in series and supplied as mastered, have proved valuable. The practice should be encouraged. There must be all possible recognition of class findings, but we suggest that there be intent to do group teaching rather than acceptance of the situation from the first as an individual matter.

Teaching must be formal rather than incidental. There must be a scheduled period for the work and consciousness on the part of class and teacher alike that this period is for English improvement. Each hour should be given to a definite part of the term outline, and each lesson planned, in amount and difficulty, for the average student. Slow pupils will be brought even by extra help. The more advanced should be held to longitudinal work within the hour's material and not given work of higher type.

Whether or not to use textbooks has been much discussed. I believe that any fairly good text is better than none. Every text needs to be supplemented, and this will be satisfactorily done by the average teacher. Teaching from an outline or the *making* of a text as the work proceeds is too much to expect of the average teacher. Yes, it has been done with some success, but not without great loss. Time required for visional study and discrimination in method has been put upon the collection and copying of material. Such of these courses and texts as have come to my attention have been poorly organized and have taken too much for granted. They are not texts; they are a practical supplement to the text that is not included. Let us choose a good book, one as nearly fitted to our purpose as can be found. This will insure many things being uniformly understood and will conserve the instructor's time in that he will be spared constant repetition of troublesome facts and principles. Not all parts of a text will be used and the printed order will probably be ignored.

Nothing must be taught because of precedent or because a text presents it. Neither will a proved method always bring results. Appeal to the eyes must be made constantly. We should employ slides and films when convenient. Students must do blackboard work and much oral work. Manual activity is urged, not that these learners need the physical movement as do classes in all-day sessions, but because they learn more quickly through manipulative experiences. Little home work, other than reading, should be assigned. The class hour should cover presentation, drill, reference, study, and questioning. What is done further than these supervised things should be optional but credited nevertheless. Under any other procedure, a few ambitious and well-prepared students will set a standard that cannot be maintained by the average.

EIGHT CHANCES TO SERVE

These, then, are the circumstances to be met: new aims, greater variables of preparation and learning ability, irregular methods of grouping, many teachers with lack of subject-training, little or no supervision, conflicting conceptions of what the young folks need and how it may be best presented. Can you think of a more inviting task than helping to see and to solve the present problems, and hundreds sure to arise? Where in the English-teaching field is there greater need for the help that your experience makes possible? Preparedness breeds responsibility.

(1) *Accept a part-time class, after school hours, a day or two each week or give a full year to experimentation with a variety of continuation groups.* (2) *Offer your services to the superintendent or co-ordinator or state supervisor who must arrange for these classes. He will appreciate counsel and thank you for suggestive outlines and hints on method.* (3) *Help in the preparation of teachers. Begin now to plan a course to be offered next summer at some teacher-training center.* (4) *Serve upon an advisory board.* (5) *Invite the new workers to your association meetings.* (6) *Publish material which stresses essentials and takes little for granted.* (7) *Interest yourselves in unit instruction.* (8) *Urge departmental work and supervision.*

Professionalism prompts your activity to the end that what is done part time in this field may be well done.